

Fact Sheet

Influenza

Control of Influenza and Other Respiratory Outbreaks in Schools

Influenza in Schools

Outbreaks of influenza and respiratory illness are common in the winter months. There are many school-based strategies for limiting spread of illness that should be considered when school absences due to illness reaches or exceeds 10 percent of the school enrollment.

Infectious Period

Students and staff may be able to infect each other one day before symptoms occur and up to ten days after being sick.

The following are key intervention measures for schools to reduce transmission and potentially contain outbreaks of influenza and other respiratory diseases:

- **Collaborate.** Work with the local public health agency (LPHA) to decrease transmission of these viruses and possibly decrease the school's outbreak impact on the community at large
- **Ramp up cleaning.** Conduct thorough environmental cleaning daily. Include stair hand rails, doorknobs, and other commonly touched surfaces.
- **Notify and educate parents.** Send an information letter home to parents as early in the outbreak as possible. Be sure to include the following items:
 - Symptoms of influenza, to aid in recognition of when a child has the flu;
 - When a child has the flu, they should stay home; and
 - The importance of yearly influenza vaccine, especially children with health problems like asthma.
- **Hand washing.** Teach and encourage children and staff to wash hands regularly with warm water and soap. Consider having children wash hands with soap and water for at least 15-20 seconds before and after eating, recess, gym class and every other situation involving frequent child to child interaction. Be a good role model.
- **Use hand sanitizer.** Consider the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers in the classroom when soap and water are not readily available.
- **Limit gatherings.** Limit assemblies, large group gatherings and interactions with other schools during periods of high absence (when absence is at or above 10%).
- **Think about vaccination.** Consider holding influenza vaccine clinics. Work with LPHA to determine feasibility and logistics. This is best done before outbreaks occur. Once an outbreak is occurring, vaccination of children can help to control the outbreak or limit spread within a school district and/or county. Target more than the affected school to yield the best results.
- **Utilize resources.** Use the resources at the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) as well as the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Visit the influenza web site at www.idph.state.ia.us/Cade/Influenza.aspx?pg=FluHome or www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm for fact sheets, student activities, and more.

School absence due to illness meeting or exceeding 10% should be reported to the Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology at the Iowa Department of Public Health. Please report the following for each day the school meet or exceeds 10%:

1. Reporter name
2. School name and location
3. Number absent due to illness and enrolled OR% absenteeism
4. Common illness complaints

Submit reports on the web at www.idph.state.ia.us/surveys/school_outbreaks/default.asp or by calling 1-800-362-2736.